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AUTHOR Stahl, Robert J.
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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies and defines skills associated with the commentary-discussion method of teaching in an effort to improve student learning in precollege psychology courses. First, the author examines the range of teaching methods from formal lecture to open discussion and identifies commentary-discussion as the most widely used technique. In this technique, the teacher summarizes, interprets, or clarifies information, while giving cues for verbal interaction with students at the same time. Four categories of technical teaching skills are seen to be effective in instructional behavior. "Organizational class moves" occur when the teacher builds into the lesson a segment of time whereby the major focus of the lesson is outlined or reviewed. When the teacher establishes a context to which additional information will be related, a "structuring class move" occurs. This is useful before posing a question, for example. "Conditional class moves" involve statement of a premise and immediate linking of the premise to consequent statements or questions. Provision of silence to allow students time to think about a response or to complete a task comprises a "wait-time class move." These skills should help students attain instructional goals. (AV)

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INNOVATION OR RENOVATION?
LECTURE, COMMENTARY, AND DISCUSSION
IN THE
PRECOLLEGE PSYCHOLOGY CLASSROOM

by

Robert J. Stahl
Assistant Professor of Education
Mississippi University for Women

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As is often the case, a paper addressing itself to 'innovative' teaching practices is expected to describe some new gimmick, game, or other activity to amuse and bemuse students. More often than not, such new methods and techniques are accepted more to relieve the teacher's own personal frustrations than to enhance learning on the part of a classroom full of students. While content discussing such practices is customarily included in papers of this type, this presentation, then, will violate tradition. However, the focus of this paper is very traditional.

Teachers talk in the classroom. They provide information and explanations to students. They ask questions. They give directions and instructions. They reinforce and criticize. In other words, they direct, guide, and manipulate the verbal interaction which occurs within the classroom. And, as is often the case, the time the teacher takes to provide information and directions is labeled "lecture" while the time devoted to question-and-answer dialogue is labeled "discussion." Most people would have little difficulty in providing a list of teacher and student behaviors for each of these two classroom interaction patterns, i.e., the teacher as lecturer and as discussion leader.[1]

But the matter is not quite so simple. All teacher 'lectures' are <u>not</u> lectures since most are really 'commentaries.' The point at which a formal lecture becomes an informal one has never been clearly defined. When an informal lecture becomes a type of discussion is even less clearly defined. And what occurs between the teacher and students during different types of discussions has only recently been operationally defined (Casteel and Stahl, 1973). In short, what has traditionally been classified as lecture or discussion may have been neither one of these or maybe a combination of these two methods of instruction. If operational definitions of these various terms could be develop-

[1] I am describing here teacher-student behavior during large group instruction and not such activities as occur during individualized instruction, etc.

ed, then a classification scheme to more accurately describe what goes on in the classroom would be available for educational researchers and the classroom teacher. Such a scheme would also allow for the dialogue about different teacher behaviors to include more specific terminology and clearer communications among teachers and researchers.

Terminology Defined

In an effort to establish some quantitative dimensions to these various terms, the following definitions are suggested:

a) Lecture: At least 90% of the verbal behavior is recorded as teacher talk with less than 10% recorded as student talk. In addition, at least 75% of the class time is spent in verbal behavior of either the teacher or students. Besides these requirements, the teacher talk occuring must have been consciously preplanned, prepared, and presented such that the teacher's mode of delivery is one of 'telling' students information, data, and interpretations.

b) Formal Lecture: The same as the above with the addition of the requirement that the preparation includes the development of a set of written, narrative notes regarding the content to be presented while the 'lecture' is being read or delivered.

c) Informal Lecture: The same as the above with the addition of the requirement that the preparation include the development of a set of notes (written or unwritten) or an outline of the content to be presented while the 'lecture' is being delivered.

d) Classroom Discussion: At least 65% of the behavior recorded is teacher and/or student talk and at least 10% of all behavior occurring is student talk. The teacher need not talk for a class discussion to occur.

e) Lecture-Discussion: At least 10% of the behavior occurring is coded as student verbal behavior and at least 60% of the behavior occurring is coded as teacher verbal behavior.

f) Directed Discussion: At least 20% of the behavior occurring is coded as student verbal behavior and no more than 80% of the behavior coded is teacher verbal behavior.

g) Guided Discussion: At least 40% of the behavior occurring is coded as student verbal behavior with no more than 60% of the coded behavior being teacher verbal behavior.

h) Open Discussion: At least 60% of the behavior occurring is coded as student verbal behavior with no more than 40% of the behavior coded as teacher verbal behavior.

i) Commentary: Teacher behavior summarizing, consolidating, structuring, or providing information or data; stating an interpretation; clarifying previously stated information; reviewing, giving, or summarizing directions or instructions; providing lesson set; and providing forms of verbal advance organizers.

Using the definitions just provided, a continuum illustrating the relationship among these various categories of teacher and/or student verbal behavior can be developed:

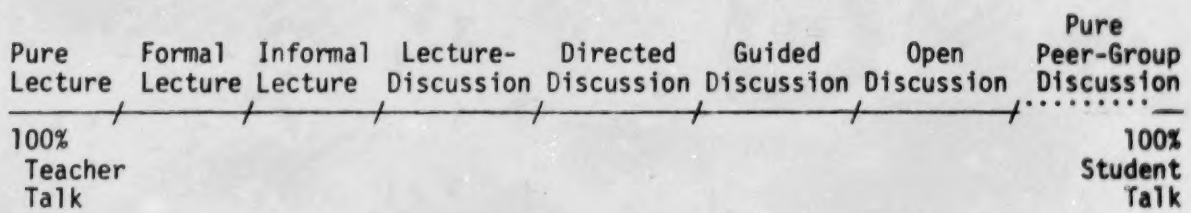

Figure 1: Continuum Illustrating the Different Types of Lectures and Discussions And Their Relationship to One Another.

Commentary

As much as lecture has been condemned, a review of the research literature comparing lecture with discussion methods reveals that there exists no substantial empirical evidence to indicate that either method is superior to the other (Dunkin and Biddle, 1974; Gage, 1976; Rosenshine and Furst, 1973). Although it is almost impossible to use or find either method in its "pure" form within a given classroom setting, the literature is saturated with reports of research done in these two areas as if each method is always found in its pure form. Equating a lecture-discussion with an open discussion is absurd enough, to group all four types of teacher-led discussions and compare this group with both types of lectures is even more absurd. Yet, this is what has been done. Even more, the operationally defined terms just presented have never been used to distinguish between types of lectures or discussion nor have researchers ever presented an operational definition whereby one could distinguish the quality of either method as it is used in the classroom.

Despite this confusion, a glance into most college teaching methods courses or an informal survey of most secondary school teachers would reveal that while the discussion method is advocated (for whatever reasons) and supported, the lecture method--more accurately, the commentary method-- is used. Indeed, it now is possible to clearly distinguish between one teacher's informal lecture, another's lecture-discussion, and yet another's directed discussions. It also becomes possible to examine all of these various methods in terms of their use of teacher commentary, other teacher-talk variables, and teacher non-verbal behaviors in order to identify teaching behaviors relevant to the enhancement of student learning.

Because it is much more formal, requires extensive preparation, and must be written prior to delivery, the formal lecture is rarely delivered in pre-college psychology classrooms. Much more likely to be found in such settings is the informal lecture. This form of lecture requires some prior planning and preparation and at least some type of informal outline or notes regarding the content to be presented. Sometimes such an outline or teacher notes is written while at other times they are mental notes one makes relative to what is to be covered or conveyed. Teacher commentary may take either of these two forms or it may be much more spontaneous and responsive in nature. The function of commentary statements depends primarily upon what it is in the lesson that needs to be done, e.g., an introduction, a review, a set of instructions, clarifying a point, etc. In each of these different examples, the teacher may spend from a few seconds to a few minutes of talk time in order to complete the statements called for within the lesson segment.

In no way can such periods be labeled as teacher 'lecture' and certainly this period should not be neatly labeled as 'discussion' leadership behavior. These commentary statements occur both in lecture and in discussion. This author's experiences with teaching, in-service and pre-service teachers, and using interaction analysis observation systems have suggested that teacher commentary is one of the pivotal periods of time in a classroom instructional episode, regardless of whether the teacher is 'lecturing' or leading a 'discussion.'

Commentary is what sets the tone for the lesson. It provides stucture, delivers much of the information, cues students, and does a lot of other things too important to be ignored. It is teacher commentary and not teacher lecture that classroom teachers and teacher educators should be most concerned.

This writer believes that secondary school teachers have long since abandoned the most traditional of all teacher presentational practices--the lecture. These teachers have adopted the commentary as a lecture-substitute; something that is suppose to work much like the lecture yet which possesses little of the more formal characteristics of the lecture method. In combination with the various forms of discussion, the commentary-discussion method of teaching has been with us, is with us, and, in all probability, will always be with us. For this reason, the innovative teaching practices to be discussed throughout the remainder of this paper will be those designed to "renovate" existing teacher behaviors associated with commentary-discussions. The purpose of this paper is to identify and define several specific skills associated with the commentary-discussion method of teaching. These behaviors are important because they have been found to be positive correlates of student process and product outcomes. Equally important, these behaviors may be incorporated into teacher lectures or discussions.

For me to advocate a change in the lecture system would be a waste of my time and yours. This will not be a "lecture against the lecture method." It is my position that what is needed is a systematic way of improving the quality of the teacher's behavior regardless of whether such behavior takes place during lecture, discussion, or informal dialogue between students and teacher. It is my contention that behaviors can be (and have been) identified and defined so that these qualitative changes in teacher behavior will produce student gains in achievement, thinking skills, attitude, and participation time. Further, I contend that enough information has been derived from the technological and scientific study of teaching-learning processes to distinguish a number of specific, qualitative, observable, and quantifiable teaching acts known to be positive correlates of student process and product variable gains. These behaviors, because they have consistently shown themselves to be positive factors in producing gains in student outcome variables, have earned the right to be labeled "technical teaching skills." This skills are to be described below.

Classroom teachers need to incorporate these behaviors into their teaching repertoire in such ways that they function to produce positive student outcomes. These teaching behaviors are not in themselves skills, but become skills when they are used functionally within the teaching-learning situation.

Most importantly, these skills are not associated with the lecture or the discussion methods per se, but are behaviors lecturers and discussion leaders

should incorporate into their present instructional behavior. Whether employed within the lecture, commentary, discussion, or a combination of these three methods, the employment of these behaviors at the skill level will significantly alter the verbal interaction of the classroom as well as enhance the amount of learning taking place on the part of students (For a review of this literature see: Casteel, 1974: Casteel and Gregory, 1974, 1975; Dunkin and Biddle, 1974; Gage, 1963, 1976; Rosenshine and Furst, 1973; Stahl, 1975, 1976).

The Technical Teaching Skills

It is useful to group these various teaching behaviors into four 'classes' or groups of skills. The labels assigned to these classes are:

I. Organizational Class Moves
II. Structuring Class Moves
III. Conditional Class Moves
Iv. Wait-time Class Moves

Each of these four classes may be defined functionally in terms of the role it plays within the teaching-learning sequence and by example in terms of the language patterns likely to be used to produce the intended result. As one comes to know and employ these behaviors functionally, then that person possesses a set of teaching skills likely to produce positive outcomes in student learnings.

In order to employ these behaviors at the skill level, i.e., functionally, rather than merely at the use level, the teacher must understand:

what the function of each of these behaviors is,
when each of these behaviors should be used, and
where in the lesson each behavior should be used.

Each of the Technical Teaching Skills described in the following section will consider these three points.

CLASS I: ORGANIZATIONAL CLASS MOVES

Because most lessons include a large quantity of information and two or more separate activities, students who are alerted to and informed about the the organizational pattern of the lesson will probably function better than students not given this information. Such information may be provided students at the outset, during the middle, or at the end of a given lesson. The information should specifically include the major ideas or learnings expected to be covered or just covered in the lesson. In part, this information also serves to help students attend to the lesson.

When the teacher deliberately and systematically brings together, forms, arranges, and/or combines several content or context elements directly relevant to the focus of the particular lesson or lesson segment for the purpose of

informing students as to the organizational scheme of the lesson and to the major learnings emphasized, then that student has performed an Organizational Class Move. In other words, when the teacher deliberately builds into the lesson a segment of time whereby the major focus of the lesson or lesson segment is introduced, outlined, or reviewed for these expressed purposes, this behavior is classified as an Organizational Class Move. These behaviors function to alert students as to what is to come and to inform students as to the major ideas to be or already presented. The 7 categories of skills in this class of behaviors are:

A. Lesson Set. This set of behaviors initiates the entire lesson. It is characterized by the deliberate effort made to orient the student in advance as to what the lesson will cover, what its focus will be, what the sequence of activities will be, and what the lesson is designed to accomplish. Its major function is to alert students to the central focus of the lesson and to the sequence of activities that is to be followed. This behavior set serves a function similar to that of an advance organizer, i.e., to pre-inform. The two types of Lesson Set are:

(1) Lesson Set Commentary. Here the teacher takes a period of time at at the start of the lesson to present the organizational schema and the focus of the lesson without soliciting student responses. The teacher takes upto three to five minutes to deliberately explain to students what is to be covered, why it is to be studied, and how it is to be covered within the context of the class period.

(2) Lesson Set Dialogue. Here the teacher takes a period of time at the start of the lesson to provide the organizational schema and the focus of the lesson via an active dialogue with students. The teacher must direct student responses to explaining how things covered are related and what sequence of events would most likely lead in directions toward which the class is already heading, i.e., to posit logical steps to follow along its inquiry-oriented lesson.

B. Internal Set. This set of behaviors occurs during the the course of the lesson and represents the transition phase from one major lesson segment to another. This behavior functions both to inform students as to what has already been covered and to alert them to what is to come in the next segment. These behaviors occur when the activity of the class shifts from one focus to another or from one activity to another. The two types of

Internal Set are:

(3) Internal Set Commentary. Here the teacher takes a period of time during the lesson to inform students of the end of one segment of the lesson and to alert them to the new segment about to be started. This commentary does not seek to include student responses. The behavior tells students that the lesson is about to shift its focus from one type of behavior, activity, or content to another.

(4) Internal Set Dialogue. Here the teacher takes a period of time during the lesson to move from one lesson segment to another and involves students actively in this transitional phase. The teacher directs the students in a mini-review of what has just occurred, what will or ought to be done next, and how these two segments are related to the same central focus or purpose.

C. Lesson Closure. This set of behaviors occurs during the final part of the lesson and serves to refocus on (and recall) the major ideas and learnings of the just completed lesson towards placing them in their proper perspective and tying them together. To be successful, this behavior requires a deliberate effort on the part of the teacher to close out the lesson in light of the organizers established at the outset of and during the lesson. The three types of Lesson Closure are:

(5) Summary-Review. Here the teacher takes the time at the end of the lesson to review the major ideas and learnings covered in the lesson placing special emphasis on how the information and ideas interrelate. This review-summary must be concise and specific and must represent a period of time specifically set aside for this behavior.

(6) Summary-Review Dialogue. Here the teacher takes the time at the end of the lesson to solicit from students the major ideas and learnings of the lesson making sure students identify and explain the interrelationships existing among these ideas and learnings. The active dialogue requires the teacher to maintain the focus of this segment of the lesson, that is to summarize and review what has been presented.

(7) Preset Closure. Here the teacher takes the time at the end of the lesson to inform students as to the relationship of the day's lesson with their homework assignment and, more importantly, with their next day's lesson. Thus, the teacher provides for the transition (bridge) from one lesson to the next.

CLASS II: STRUCTURING CLASS MOVES

Teaching behaviors associated with this class function to provide a contextual advance organizer within and from which students can interpret the situation, begin to retreive relevant information, and/or frame a response. In part, they serve to alert students throught the use of verbal cues to the context that is (or has been) being established and upon which additional information or a response is to be considered. When the teacher deliberately takes the time to establish a context or base from which additional information is to be tied or requested, and this context or base is presented prior to the presentation of additional information or the solicitation of such information, a Structuring Class Move has occurred. The two types of moves in this class are:

(8) Pre-Question Structure. Here the teacher provides the context useful to answering a question immediately prior to the asking of the question. Here the teacher may take up to two minutes to build an information base from which a question if to be framed prior to the asking of the question. During this time period, the teacher alerts students to the fact that the information being presented is important to the question that is to follow.

(9) Hypothetico-Deductive Structure. Here the teacher provides a hypothetical or pretended context from which the student is to understand an explanation, grasp a relationship, or answer a question. Here the teacher deliberately establishes a set of supposed contextual cues designed to inform students as to the 'givens' operating within the immediate situation. This context is commonly introduced by terms like "Let's imagine," "Suppose," "Pretent," and "Let's pretent." During this behavior, the teacher takes the time to build a set of supposed facts or assumptions from which students are to frame a response or consider an explanation.

CLASS III: CONDITIONAL CLASS MOVES

Teachers posit as one of their major instructional goals the development of thinking skills in students. Processes such as problem-solving, logical reasoning, and critical thinking are but a few of the process skills teachers desire their students to acquire. A key to the development of these processes is the understanding are accurate use of conditional logic paradigms. Unless students can use such paradigms, then they lack any formal way of linking a

given premise to consequent occurrences.

Conditional Class Moves cue students to the premise which they are to use or operate from and alert students to the consequent behavior or context which is tied to the stated premise. By using this paradigm in class, the teacher provides students with a useful model they can incorporate into their own thinking and speaking behavior. When the premise is stated, the students are alerted and cued to the specific conditions or context which a consequent behavior is or is to be tied. The consequent behavior linked to the premise may be either information provided by the teacher or a request for information from students by the teacher. A complete Conditional Class Move occurs only when the teacher states the premise and then links the premise to the consequent statement or question. The five types of Conditional Class Moves are:

(10) Cueing Premise. Here the teacher cues or alerts students to the fact that the information to follw is going to be linked to some additional information or question and that this current information is important to the understanding of the consequent statement. In other words, when the teacher states the conditions, grounds, givens, or context operating within a particular situation, then the teacher provides students with a Cueing Premise and thereby alerts students to the fact that the condition just stated is linked to the next statement that is to follow. The teacher may use such verbal cues as "If," "When," "Since," Let's Assume," "Given," etc.

(11) Linking Conclusion. Here the teacher ties or connects a conclusion, effect, or result of a situation to a cause or event immediately after the cause or event has been identified in the form of a Cueing Premise. This behavior informs students that from the given context, the consequent statement of conclusion may be or has been drawn. For example: "When the bell rings, the dog will salivate."

(12) Linking Question. Here the teacher asks a question relative to a specific condition or context immediately after the condition or context has been provided in the form of a Cueing Premise. The teacher expects students to respond to the question considering the context to which the question has been linked. For example: "If the rat refuses to eat the food, what explanation could you give for this behavior?"

(13) Linking Affirmation. Here the teacher ties some form of praise, reward, or confirmational behavior to a condition or behavior which has

been identified in the form of a Cueing Premise. In other words, after the teacher has stated what conditions or behaviors have been met, the teacher then ties verbal praise, rewards, or confirmational statements to students for having met the conditions or for having behaved in accordance with the pre-established behavioral conditions. For example: "Since you all finished the assignment early and the answers are all correct, you won't have any homework for tonight."

(14) Linking Infirmation. Here the teacher ties some form of punishment, criticism, closure, or censure behavior to a condition or behavior which has been identified in the form of a Cueing Premise. In other words, the teacher states a form of infirming behavior which is deserving because of a condition or behavior previously identified as being a (or the) condition warranting such behavior. For example: "Because you refused to talk in our class discussions, I'm going to give you an 'F' in 'Class Participation'."

CLASS IV: WAIT-TIME CLASS MOVES

Within the classroom, teachers and students often need time in order to retreive and translate information, to reflect upon previous statements, to frame or complete a response, to complete a task, and to think. For most students (and adults), silence is the best thing that could be happening while these thought processes are going on. What is often needed in the classroom is a particular situation is a period of uninterrupted silence so that an individual can think or complete a response. When the teacher deliberately provides this silence time so that students have the chance to think about a response or to complete a task, then a Wait-Time Class Move has occurred. In this way, Wait-time occurs when the teacher "waits" for a student to complete a response or task or when the teacher consciously "waits" (delays) before entering the conversation while students "think about" what has previously occurred. The six types of Wait-Time Class Moves are:

(15) Post-Question Wait-Time. Here the teacher waits or pauses for a period of 3 seconds or more immediately following a teacher question. This time allows students to reflect upon the question, retreive related information, frame a response, and initiate the response.

(16) Within-Student Response Pause Time. When they speak, individuals frequently tend to talk in short bursts, pause, then go on with a

short burst of talk, pause, and so on. A period of 3 seconds or more to allow students a chance to complete their pause and go on to complete their response is the intent of this type of wait-time.

(17) Post-Student Response Wait-Time. After a student response or a series of student responses, the teacher 'waits' for 3 or more seconds in order to give students a chance to follow-up by adding their own comments and reactions to the discussion. This period of time allows other students to think about what has been said, to frame their responses, and to respond within the discussion without the intervention of the teacher.

(18) Teacher Reflective Pause Time. After a student response or a series of student responses, the teacher may need time to contemplate what has been said, where the lesson is at that particular point in time, and what the next step should be. The teacher may need to consider the accuracy or consistency of a given statement just presented. In either case, when the teacher deliberately pauses for 3 seconds or more in order to reflect upon these things before continuing the lesson, then this particular wait-time move has occurred.

(19) Task Completion Wait-Time. If a task is important enough to be assigned class time to allow students to work on it, then the teacher should protect this time. When a task is assigned students, then the teacher should not allow this time to be interrupted by additional verbal information. Here the teacher preserves the time given for students to complete a task for the completion of the task and therefore 'waits' after the assignment has been started until it is completed before joining in with any discussion or commentary.

The four Classes of Technical Teaching Skills containing 19 specific skill behaviors make up one set of such behaviors directly relevant to teacher presentational or commentary behavior.

Whether used in lecture, discussion, or general commentary, the teacher who uses these behaviors functionally has a greater chance of assisting students attain her/his instructional goals than the teacher who does not use these behaviors. As defined and described, the classroom teacher can listen to audio-tapes of her/his own teaching and critique the lesson. In any case, the inclusion of these behaviors will result only after a concerted and continued effort on the part of the teacher, and after all, aren't most skills attained this way?

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